

Section VII.
Housing and Living Conditions

Executive Summary:

- Most rent an apartment or small houses where usually two or more households live.
- Both rents and crowdedness are higher on the regions along the Central Coast compared to the interior areas.
- Two-thirds of the dwellings in the ICS are extremely crowded—greater than 1.5 people per room. In Watsonville, the most crowded place in the ICS, the average is 3.0 people per room.
- The crowdedness by hometown is highly variable with location and maturity of the network both having an impact.
- About 20 % of the people sleep outside of the bedrooms, mostly in the living room or a garage.

VII-1 Introduction:

The living conditions facing indigenous farmworkers, which differ across the distinct regions of California, are consistently appalling. The degree of crowding, described in detail below, is truly remarkable. Although it is impossible to provide numbers or percentages, many still live in make-shift shelters or without shelter at all. The health implications of these shameful conditions are detailed in Section VIII-5.1 below. We compare the findings about our proxy for indigenous (Southern Mexicans) from the NAWS and findings from the Indigenous Community Survey to portray the major living condition facts about indigenous farmworkers.

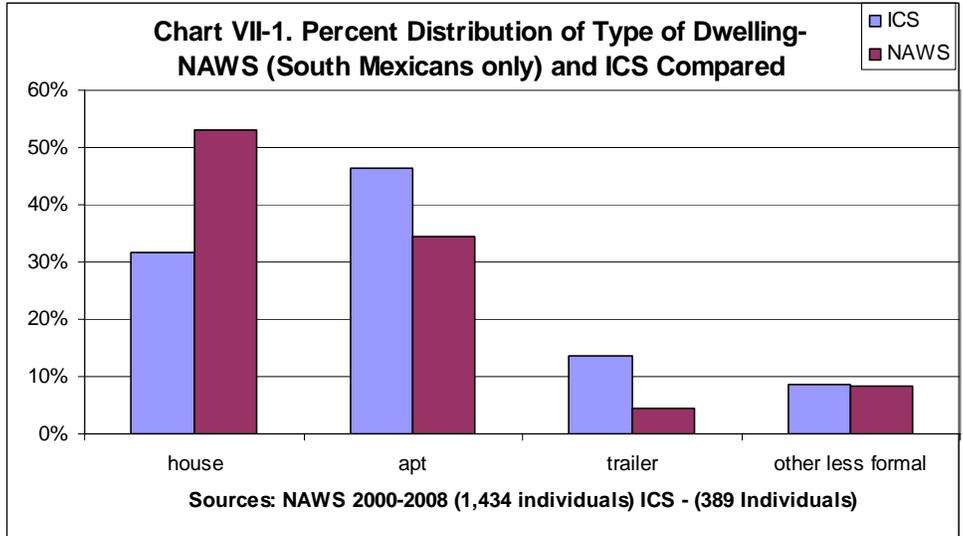
VII-2 Ownership and types of dwellings:

First, it is clear from both surveys that few indigenous farmworker families own the dwelling they occupy. In our sample of 400 households in the ICS, only 42 (11%) owned their residence. But, of these 42, only 18 owned houses, while 24 others owned trailers. Another 346 (86%) rented and 11 others (or 3%) lived in the fields.¹ And, the percentages in our sample for home ownership are undoubtedly higher than those of the general indigenous farmworker population. In the ICS, almost all of the owners of dwellings (37 out of the 42) were from the two most settled communities—Santa María Teposlantongo and San Miguel Cuevas. The rate of ownership in the rest of the communities was just two percent.² The NAWS reports that four percent of the population of southern Mexican farmworkers living in California own the dwellings in which live.³

¹ One lived in a house of refuge for battered women.

² It is likely that the rate of home ownership may have declined more with the foreclosure crisis.

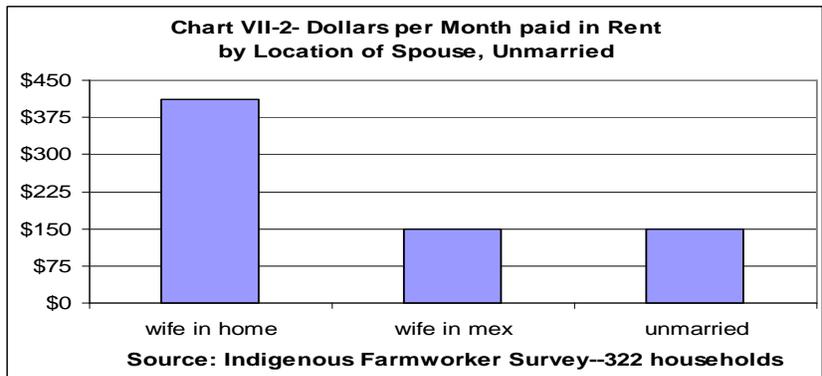
³ In data from the NAWS 2000-2008, for Southern Mexicans, n= 2,276 households and 3.6% own or are buying a home; for the rest of Mexico, n=10,600 and 14.1% own or are buying a home.



Most live crowded in apartments or rented houses. In the ICS sample, the largest plurality (46%) lived in apartments and fewer lived in (almost always rented) houses (32%). But, in the NAWS, more southern Mexicans lived in rented houses (53%) and fewer lived in apartments (34%)—see Chart VII-1, above. A much smaller percentage lives in trailers (only 4% in the NAWS for southern Mexicans). In addition, many (almost 10%) live in barracks, make-shift buildings and vehicles behind houses, and other structures (called in Chart VII-1: other less formal). Finally, there are many who live in the canyons of northern San Diego County and elsewhere in the state outside in caves or in plastic structures. That exact percentage is impossible to measure by survey research.

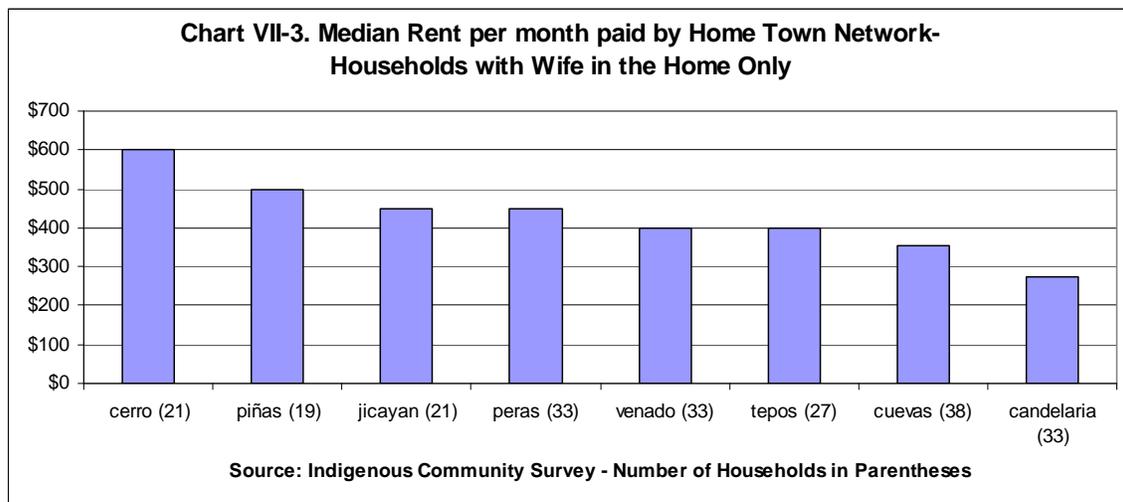
VII-3 Rent and mortgage levels:

In the ICS, the median rent for the 338 households that paid rent in 2008 was about \$360 per month. The median is much higher for households with the spouse (and usually children) present; in cases with the entire family living together, the median rent is \$411 per month (see Chart VII-2). However, in households where the spouses are in Mexico, or the respondent is single (and the rent is for one person), the median rent is only \$150 per month.



The household rent doesn't vary among houses, apartments and trailers. When we compared only couples living together (usually with children) in the ICS, we found the median rent was approximately \$400 per month for all the types of dwellings. The amount of mortgage paid was quite different for those owning a house from those owning a trailer. The 18 house owners had a median payment of \$1,079 per month, while the median for the 24 trailer owners was \$284 per month.

Not surprisingly, the rents varied greatly by locality in California. In the NAWS, the rents in the coastal region were much higher than in the San Joaquin Valley.⁴ Remembering that the ICS has a very small sample, its findings clearly corroborate that the rents on the coast for indigenous workers are higher than in the San Joaquin Valley. The median rent (again just for couples living together) is from \$400 to \$700 in the coastal areas, while in the San Joaquin Valley (Fresno and Bakersfield), the farmworkers pay more modest rents (medians of \$280 to \$350).



A further proof that locality (or proximity to the coast) is the most important factor controlling rents can be seen in Chart VII-3 (above) where median rents paid by hometown networks are compared. Each hometown network is highly concentrated either on the coast or in the San Joaquin Valley. The one exception is Jicayán de Tovar that has more settlers on the coast but has many in the San Joaquin Valley as well. The rents paid by members of these hometown networks appear highly sensitive to the region. Again, for couples/families living together, the relatively recently-arrived network from Cerro del Aire pays the most rent (median \$600) because its members almost all live in the high-priced Santa Rosa area.⁵ The long-established networks of Santa María Teposlantongo and San Miguel Cuevas actually pay less rent despite being relatively better off economically because they live mostly in the San Joaquin Valley. The low

⁴ The NAWS San Joaquin Valley counties are: Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare. The coastal counties in the NAWS are: Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Ventura

⁵ The median year of arrival of adults from Cerro del Aire is 2001. Only 3 of the 9 case study hometowns have a more recent median year of arrival.

median rent also applies to the couples/families from the other predominantly San Joaquin Valley-based network—Candelaria la Union. All the other hometowns whose network members live mostly on the coast register higher median rents.

VII-4 Crowded dwellings:

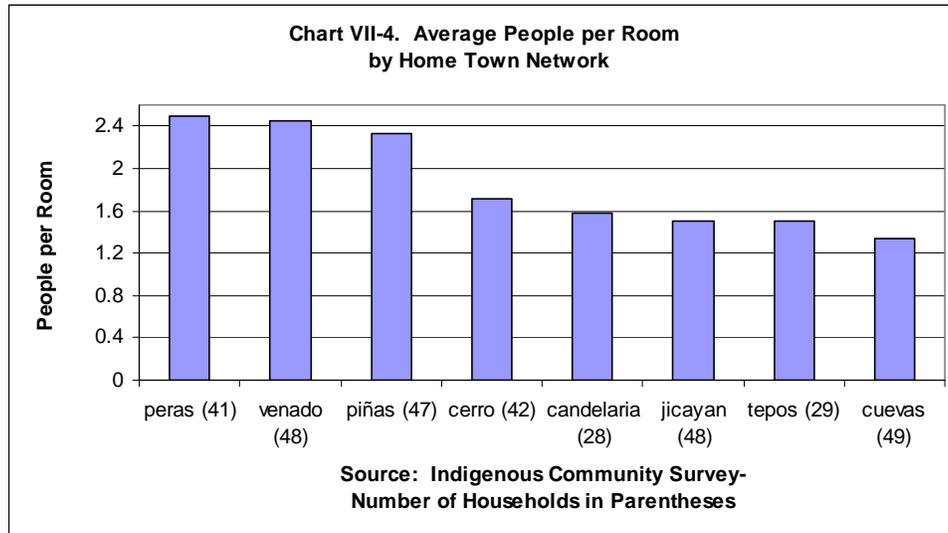
The U.S. Census Bureau defines crowdedness by the total number of people sleeping in the dwelling divided by the total number of rooms, including bedrooms, living rooms, and kitchens in the living space. If this ratio is greater than 1.0 the dwelling is considered crowded. If the ratio rises to 1.5, then the classification used is “severely crowded.” In recent years, California, a particularly crowded state, is becoming more crowded as prices of houses and levels of rents have soared ahead of earnings. In the 2000 Census, 9.1% of the units were considered “severely crowded” up from 7.1% in the 1990 Census.⁶

For the people in our ICS sample of 345 dwellings, the level of crowdedness is far more extreme than for Californians in general.⁷ Overall, 2/3rds of the dwellings (excluding the dwelling areas of the 11 households living in “outside” areas) surpass the 1.5 minimum to be considered “severely crowded”, and 94% surpass the 1.0 minimum and are considered “crowded.” The overall median for these dwellings (with four walls) is 1.75 people per room. It is clear that an extraordinary level of crowding exists in this population. It is extremely common to observe three families with young children living in a small two-bedroom apartment with one of the three families sleeping in the living room. Joint payment of rent and mortgage is very common. Among those that rent, only 17% of the renting households pay all the rent; fully 83% share the rent with others at the residence. Moreover, in the ICS, 12 of the 42 owners had joint possession of their dwelling with another family. And, recall that 20 percent of the residences have either married siblings living together or parents living with married children.

The amount of crowding does vary across different kinds of dwellings. Trailers actually appear to be less crowded (median of 1.3 people per room) than houses and apartments (1.75 people per room). Neither the calculations for the Indigenous Community Survey nor the ones for the Census Bureau estimate take into consideration the size of the rooms, which may be smaller in trailers.

⁶ See <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/housing/census/historic/crowding.html>; the rates of just “crowded” were 12.3% (1990) and 15.2% (2000) for California.

⁷ Recall that we have 400 households sharing 345 residences. For this reason our crowdedness calculations are based on 345 dwellings. See Section IV for details.



There is also considerable variation by town of origin and by region in California. Looking at Chart VII-4 (above), one sees that the more settled towns of Santa Maria Teposlantongo (tepos) and San Miguel Cuevas (cuevas), along with two other town networks whose people live mostly or partially in the San Joaquin Valley (jicayan and candelaria), have lower median levels of crowdedness. However, all of the networks except San Miguel Cuevas have a median of “severe crowding”. The rates of crowding (over 2.4 people per room) among those who originate in Santa Cruz Río Venado and San Martín Peras are truly shocking.

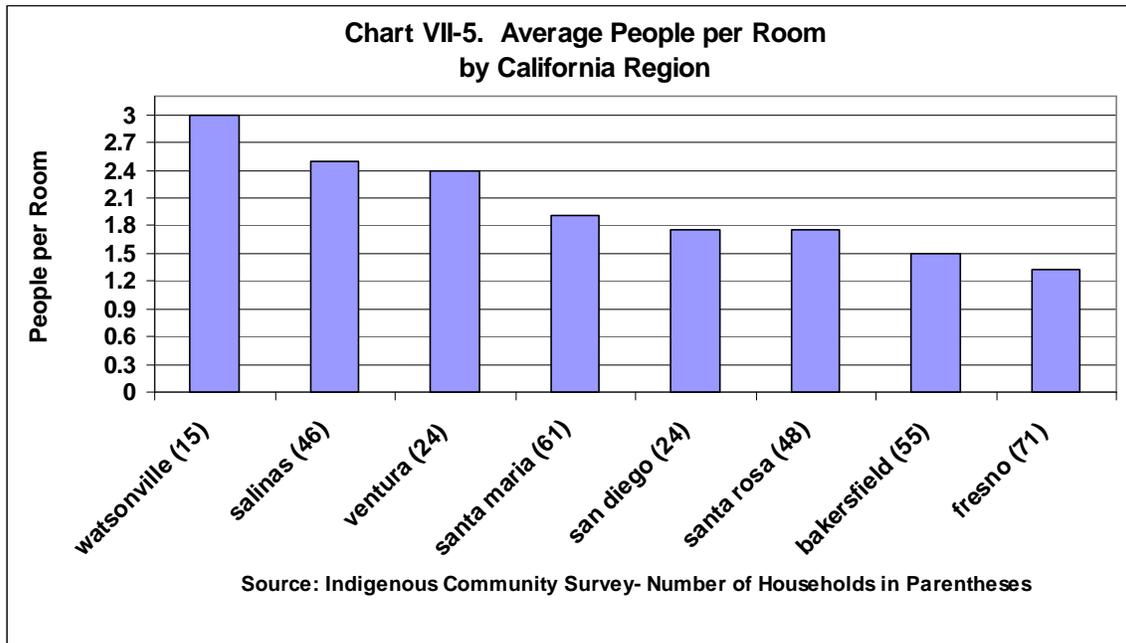
Chart VII-5 below reveals that there is a great deal of variation across California regions where the indigenous farmworkers live. The coastal regions show a much higher level of crowdedness than the interior ones. It is important to emphasize that, with the exception of Fresno,⁸ all the regions have medians at or above the level of “severe crowding.” In Watsonville, the crowding reaches the astonishing level of 3.0 people per room.

We can also verify the crowdedness on the coast by use of the NAWS. The NAWS also measures the number of people per room and shows a much higher level of crowdedness for southern Mexicans along the coast than in the San Joaquin Valley.⁹ Another indicator of lack of adequate housing access for indigenous farmworkers along the coast is the low level of home ownership in this region. In the ICS, only five of the 42 owner-occupied dwellings are on the coast while the remaining 37 are in the San Joaquin Valley. In the NAWS, for the sample taken during the 2006-2008 period, four percent of southern

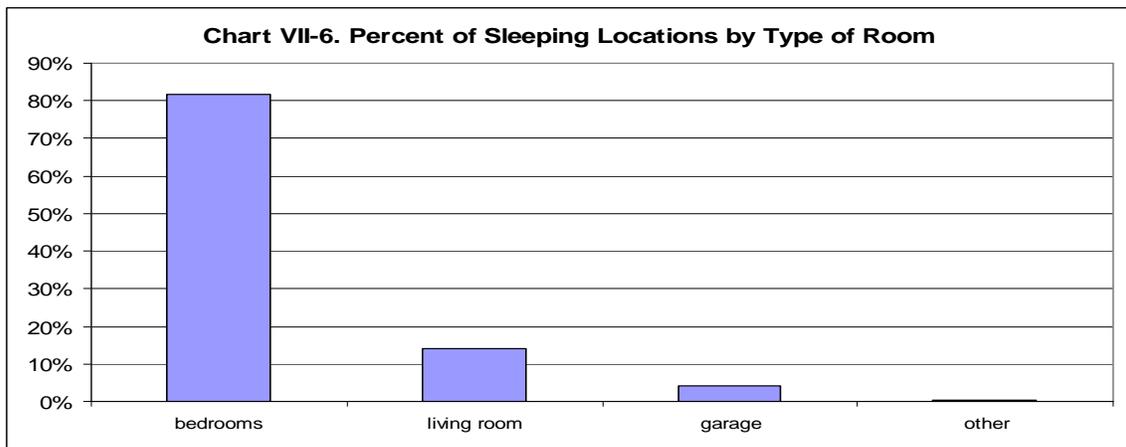
⁸ In the ICS sample and in the San Miguel Cuevas community in general a large proportion of the population lives in trailers. The Fresno sample is made up mostly of people from San Miguel Cuevas.

⁹ We are not reporting the absolute numbers for this variable from the NAWS at this time. It is not clear whether the rooms counted by the NAWS are in compliance with the Census definition. However, the numbers were collected systematically across households and regions, and the NAWS comparisons of crowdedness across variables are valid. The crowdedness is much higher for southern Mexicans than for others in the NAWS. But, again, we cannot report actual numbers at this time.

Mexicans own a home along the coast while seven percent of the southern Mexicans in the San Joaquin Valley do.¹⁰



Surprisingly, measures of crowdedness, even for expected ones like the length of time in the United States, do not vary much across the other variables. Even if we measure the crowdedness by type of household organization in the ICS (i.e., by marital status and location of spouse), we find that there is only a small variation. The more settled households with the wife in the home have only a slightly lower median of people per room (1.7) than the unaccompanied immigrants who are either unmarried or who have a spouse in Mexico (1.8 and 1.9 people per room respectively). It appears that among the indigenous farmworker population all types of households live in ‘severely crowded’ circumstances.



¹⁰ NAWS 2006 to 2008, n=609

Another measure of crowdedness is the proportion of people sleeping outside of the bedrooms. In the ICS, of the 2,604 individuals living in these households almost 20 percent slept in a room other than a bedroom (see Chart VII-6, above). Of these, 14 percent of the people slept in living rooms and 5 percent slept in garages.

The crowding is exacerbated by periods during the year (usually at the peak agricultural season) when more people than normal are allowed to sleep in the dwellings. Overall, about one fifth of the households in the ICS report extra crowding during peak season. This extra (seasonal) crowding occurs across all households but less in the ones in which the married respondent lives with his/her spouse in the household.

VII-5 Complaints about living conditions:

The residents of these dwellings were reported by interviewers to be reticent to complain about their housing conditions. Still, 40% of the 400 households made one or more complaints about their dwelling. In Chart VII-7, the 286 complaints made by 140 households are displayed. The major complaints were lack of heating or cooling, leaky roofs and plumbing problems. See Section VIII-5.1 for some first-hand accounts of living conditions.

